1:Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1954 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

693
651
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PLATE VI. The clerk of a county Native Court checks the whereabouts of men on the tax register of a village with an important man in the village. Standing are a Native Authority messenger with fez, and an Administrative messenger. The village headman and some of his people sit in the background.

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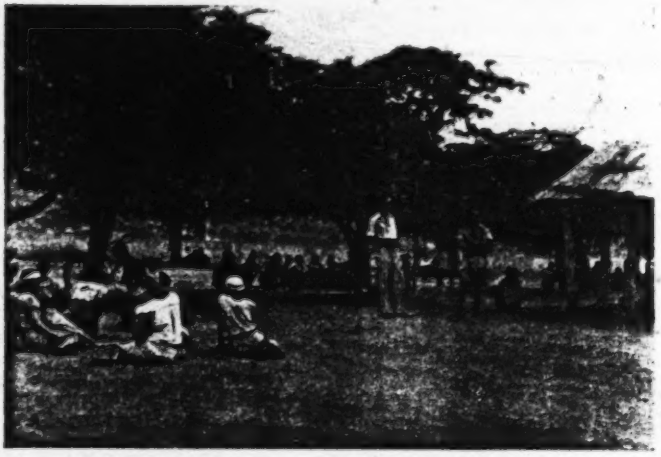

PLATE VII. Litigants outside a county Native Court wait for hearings to begin.

[Facing p. 152]

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5



national ritual of the first-fruits ceremony (*incwala*), which brought all the people to the royal village, was also abandoned before the Ngoni kingdoms were finally established, for no old person alive in the 1930's had seen the *incwala* ceremony.

(*d*) *The ceremonial pattern*

Ngoni songs and dances were performed without the accompaniment of drums and the words of the songs sung in the 1930's were in the Ngoni language. The war-dance, *ligubo*, was still danced at the royal village and at the funerals of Paramounts and Royal Sisters. The *ngoma* dance, performed after the harvest by young men and girls, was encouraged by the two Ngoni Paramounts, who endeavoured to prohibit other dances which were not of Ngoni origin.

Ceremonial dress, especially the war-dress of the men, was well preserved by heads of clans in the 1930's in the central Ngoni kingdom. In both kingdoms the Ngoni leading women wore their traditional bead ornaments on the head and neck and arms, and tied their cloths on festive occasions in the way in which their ancestors wore the long lengths of soft dressed leather.

Only in Ngoni families were to be found the making of milk curds (*amasi*), the cooked blood (*ulubende*), and the stamped maize (*izinkobe*), all of which were traditional foods brought by them from the south.

(*e*) *The linguistic pattern*

In the 1930's the Ngoni language had almost disappeared as a home language, except in Chief Mperembe's area in the northern kingdom. The majority of the older men could still speak and understand Ngoni, and nearly all the men who had been away to work in Southern Rhodesia or the Transvaal had renewed their knowledge of Ngoni or learnt to understand it from working with men who spoke Ndebele, Zulu or Swazi. The texts in this book from the northern kingdom were given in the Ngoni language and translated for me by Y. M. Cibambo. His own texts were written for me in English. The texts from the central kingdom were given in Nyanja and translated by me. The vernacular terms used in this book illustrate the continued use of Ngoni terms for traditional offices and objects, though in the central kingdom many of these were being replaced by Nyanja terms. Words of traditional songs, some ritual formulae, some forms of address, some titles of senior persons or groups —all these were in Ngoni. The younger generation, however, especially if they had not been south and heard Zulu or Ndebele, were not able to make any of the clicks, or to pronounce such double consonants as *dl* and *hl*.

The Ngoni were punctilious about etiquette, and especially about the linguistic terms required by good manners for greeting persons of different rank and seniority, thanking for gifts or for an audience, taking

thorn stuck at the top of the *isibhutu*, and round it they put narrow bands of beads (*intuyeya* and *isincuaye*) arranged in layers. Royal women wore leopard and lion claws among the beads. Round the neck and on the arms they wore coils of brass wire (*amasongo*) which they got from the Arabs, or *izipote*, strings of beads wound round a piece of cloth. The kilt of soft dressed leather (*isidwaba*) reached from the waist to the knee, and wrapped well over. A long piece of soft leather (*ingcayi*) was fastened on the left shoulder and reached a little below the knees. On the edges of the *ingcayi* were fastened small bells made of brass (*ngomani*). Ngoni women did not like to cut their bodies with tattoo marks. They said it was ugly. The *inkosikazi* might decorate other wives at the *ngoma* dance because she had a large store of beads and wire and leather cloths.

The common features of the life of leading women as illustrated in these texts were: the number of attendants and servants in their households and their consequent freedom from manual work; the etiquette surrounding life in the *indlunkulu* and the big house, and the formality of hospitality, beer-drinks and dances; relationships with their *induna*, and with their husbands, and, as illustrated by Margaret Jere, with the paternal grandmother who supervised their upbringing when they were young.

In addition to the *induna* in charge of the big house, the royal women and leading women in the villages of chiefs and *ahumuzana* were surrounded by a number of young girls and serving women. These were known in pre-European days as domestic slaves or servants (*micetho*), girl companions (*izidandani*), nurse girls (*alezi*) and older women attendants (*agogo*). Informants said that in pre-European days there were fifteen or twenty girls in each royal household and the number was constantly being added to when female slaves were captured in war and allocated as servants to the Paramount's wives. All the texts in this chapter refer to the fact that the royal women and the leading women did no work, and there was always a nostalgic refrain from senior women informants about the time devoted to hair-dressing and beauty treatments, to 'just sitting', and to dancing and drinking beer, while all the household tasks and the care of the children fell to the servants. The Ngoni royal women, even in the 1930's, commanded the labour of six to ten women and girls in each household. The hard physical work of fetching firewood and water, pounding grain, preparing vegetables and often cooking too, was done largely by servants in the Paramount's and chief's villages where I stayed. There were young nurse girls and older women to help with the children and with the adolescent girls. There were no longer any domestic slaves, and the domestic helpers, who were often distant relatives of the wives, appeared to enjoy the prestige of being attached to an important house.

The royal women in pre-European days were distinguished by the clothes and ornaments they wore which were reserved for the royal

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5



clan and for women of leading Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans. Two of the texts emphasized the distinction conferred on the royal women by special clothing. Cibambo described the use of well-dressed soft skins and of beads and wire, the beads brought with them from the south, the brass wire obtained from the Arabs. In NaNdumbu's text she mentioned cloth bought from the stores. After the Ngoni women gave up wearing soft leather for skirts and the long piece of leather draped from the left shoulder, they used strong cotton cloth of dark blue or black, originally brought by the Arabs and later stocked by the stores. They tied the main cloth under their arms in a draped knot over the breast and on ceremonial occasions they added another fastened on the left shoulder like a plaid. A woman who had been a young girl in the village of Paramount Cikusi, but was not of a leading clan, said that in this village there was a great difference between the royal women and the rest: 'Only the daughters of Cikusi and his big wives could wear dark cloth as the Ngoni do. The others would have been killed if they tried to look like the big women'.

The royal women and the big wives and widows of chiefs and *alumuzana* were treated by all with whom they came in contact with the distinction and respect due to their prestige. They were addressed and thanked by the term *Nkomo*, with the clan name and the honorific prefix added, except where, as in the case of Bambo Manga, a title had been conferred. She was thanked '*Nkomo Bambo*'.[1] *Ukuhlonipa*, and its Nyanja equivalent *kulemekeza*, meaning to honour and to behave in a respectful manner towards senior people and those of superior rank, was an expression constantly used by the Ngoni and by the other peoples in the Ngoni kingdoms. The forms of showing respect were partly verbal; partly in the position adopted, with the eyes cast down and a slight curtsey by the women when facing someone; partly in the tone of voice when speaking; and partly in the deliberate and controlled behaviour noticed by several early travellers in Nyasaland. A particular verbal form of respect practised by the royal women was the use of the *hlonipa* vocabulary. I found this practice surviving only in the Emcisweni area in northern Ngoniland where the Ngoni language was still spoken, but informants said that it had been common to all married women of trans-Zambesi clans in the northern kingdom when they had spoken Ngoni among themselves. The *hlonipa* vocabulary consisted of the substitution of special words, known only to the women, in order to avoid using a word in which the main syllable of a man's name occurred—a man with whom they were connected by marriage or by affinal relationship.[2] Thus Zwangendaba's wives and widows could

[1] *Bambo* (father) was a term of respect used for important senior men.

[2] *Hlonipa* as a form of special vocabulary was widely practised among the Nguni groups in South Africa. Hoernlé, A. W. 'Social Organisation', in *The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, pp. 74, 77.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5



(*ukuqandisa*). The middle section, the main part of the ceremony, took place in the husband's village while the bridal party was there. In the last part the bride was left in her new home and three ceremonies marked her gradual integration into her new social group.

After the number of cattle had been decided upon in the final stage of the betrothal, the initiative was left to the girl's parents to announce the date of the *mtimba*. Eventually a message was sent through the *gogo* house of the girl's village to say that the bridal party would arrive on a certain day. Before the day came, the girl, now addressed as *umlobokazi* (the bride), was called to the *indlunkulu* in her village. There the leading women, her father's mothers, who had called in her father's sisters, gave her final instructions on how to behave in her new home. Ngoni women said that they were told at this time: 'Our child, we are putting you out of our family. We are handing you over to the other people. You were free and now your freedom is over for you are under other people. Where you are going you will meet with many troubles. They will say of you many things which you did not do. It is good to be patient.' During this instruction the girl cried and so did her mother. On the morning of the departure the girl was dressed in freshly prepared skins, her hair was arranged in the *isihlutu* (chignon) to which the gall bladder of a goat was pinned, and the gall bladder of a cow was tied to her elbow. Then, still sobbing and whimpering, and surrounded by her age mates and the female members of her house, she set out for her bridegroom's village, the young men of her village driving a bullock (*mcando*) as a present from the bride's parents to the mother of the bridegroom, in whose herd it was placed.

This part of the ceremony, the entry of the bride's party (*ukuqandisa*), was held to be of great importance, since it was the first time the bride's family and friends as a group had met the husband's family. The bride's procession waited by the kraal gate, singing *mtimba* songs, and every now and then a woman of the bride's party, one of her father's sisters, sang the praises of the bride's clan. As the young men driving the bullock entered the kraal, the bridal party joined them and they began to dance in the kraal.

Now the first overtures were made between the bride's party and the people of the bridegroom's village. The older women of the village approached the older women of the bride's party, greeting them and exchanging, in the Ngoni phrase, 'words which were good and proud and showed the quickness of their tongues'.

After these advances, the men of the village came into the kraal or gathered by the *indlunkulu*. While the bridal party began to sing with their heads bowed, the chief woman from the *indlunkulu* of the bride's village came forward, bending low, and on her knees presented to the *induna* of the *indlunkulu* of the husband's village a basket containing snuff boxes and beads. She made a speech, in which she said, 'Here is

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

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142
411

1. Chief dressed for war-dance

[facing page 16]
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3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

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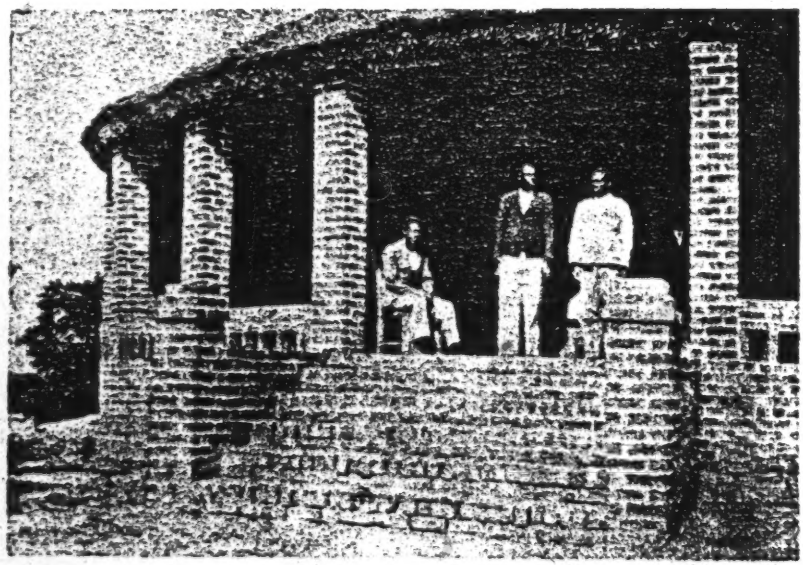
142

4. Chief waiting to hear cases



5. Chief with his elders in his court-house

[facing page 32]

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5



885 the songs had veiled allusions to sexual intercourse and sex
533 organs but the majority were songs recalling historical events.
831 Others warned young wives against jealousy and strife in polygamous households, and these again were couched in veiled language, because the Ngoni preferred allusive references to anything touching on sex life.

292 When the girl and her companion emerged from the hut
885 of seclusion, they were fully dressed in a short leather skirt,
301 cut on a circular pattern, and a long leather cloak often trimmed with a fringe of tiny brass bells or small copper beads which were heirlooms belonging to the girl's father's house. The girl who was known as the 'owner of the pre-marriage ceremony' wore strips of meat strung together like
[237] beads hanging over her chest. The fat from the kidneys (always used in Ngoni ritual) was twisted into a necklace, and the skins of cows' tails, flayed and spread out were worn hanging from the waist, one in front and one behind. At the close of the ceremonies the skins and fat used for ornament were burned by a stream and the ashes swept into the water —again a typical Ngoni ritual act.

885 In one sense this ritual was a form of social announcement
556 that the girl was now ready for marriage, and the marriage
593 negotiations and full marriage ceremony followed soon after. It was also a way of emphasizing the father's pride in his daughter, and he showed it by the lavish feasting and beer, by the standard of performance of the dances and songs and by decorating the girl with meat, fat, and skins from the cattle of his house. This was the last act he performed on behalf of his daughter, for the actual marriage ceremony took place at the bridegroom's village. It showed him as a man of substance, because only rich men and leading men could afford the outlay. It also showed the girl as a virtuous woman, for
[836] the ritual was never performed unless the girl was a virgin, and the senior women had been able, after examining her, to say to her father: 'Her cattle are full.'

177 This ritual was given up about the time the missions began
885

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5



round to protect the cow and calf, until they were strong enough to go back to the kraal. 868 233

The intricate system of ownership of cattle, including the relation between a house and a herd, and between certain herds and the spirits of former great people, was part of a herd-boy's background knowledge. He listened at the kraal gate to the men discussing questions of ownership. When a decision was taken to kill a beast, or sell one, or to transfer one or more at a marriage, or to hand over a beast in payment of a fine, the senior boys knew which group of beasts in the kraal must be driven out to be looked over in order that a selection could be made by the man concerned. [422] [825]

The Ngoni classified their cattle according to age, sex, colouring, size and shape of horns, whether castrated or not, whether in calf or not. Knowledge of the extensive series of names used for these 'classes' of cattle was part of a herd-boy's A.B.C. By the time he was old enough to be told to drive certain cattle out of the kraal, designated by their class, he knew exactly which ones were meant. He could also use the cattle terminology to be precise in telling an owner about a beast which had strayed or one that had a sore hoof, or one that was giving an exceptionally good or poor flow of milk. [192]

Herd-boys learned that cattle constituted a form of wealth, not only by the numbers a man possessed and could display, but also because they were easily realizable assets. Cattle could be sold to pay taxes, debts and court fines; and to pay men working for an Ngoni owner of cotton or tobacco gardens. They learned also that since cattle could be converted into money, the men of the house owning the cattle could use the money to buy cloth. This cloth, the property of the house, was kept and looked after by the senior women, who would lend it out temporarily to young men wishing to dress up smartly to go courting or go on a visit. [556] [432] [465] [248] [249] [292] 177 233 234

In the modern forms of Nyasaland economy it was a

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5



in with a smooth round stone. This too was hard work, but every now and then the grandmother, watching and supervising, handed out a lump of clarified fat which quickly brought up a fine polish. The girls were told that this high polish was necessary so that people might sit with pleasure on the floor, and so that all dust and refuse showed up clearly in the morning sweeping of the hut. The floor of the veranda was similarly polished, and, as we saw in Chapter IV, the more important huts had a smeared and polished space all round the front.

In arranging the inside of the hut girls were taught the right places to put the water-jars and other pots, the baskets and mats, and the bundles of cloth and ornaments belonging to the 'house' wrapped in mats or packed neatly in wooden or tin chests. Brass and bead ornaments, and special cloths for use by men and women on ceremonial occasions, were all kept in the huts of leading women. The ornaments worn by such a woman during her lifetime were returned to the 'house' after her death and looked after in the hut of her successor. These possessions and heirlooms were periodically brought out into the sun, and shaken and aired or polished. A housewife was publicly shamed if she did not take care of such property, and people spread stories that she was careless about keeping the wealth of the house in good repair. Girls were reminded of this when they were called to help at such a 'spring cleaning', and told as a warning: 'So-and-so in that village over there, she let the insects eat the cloth of the house. The mildew spoiled the bead-bands and waistcoats. The green rust came on the brass wire. She was shamed when men spoke about it.'

Part of the property of each household was the food stored after harvest or gathered from the bush. Formerly the Ngoni stored their staple cereal in pits dug in the kraal, mudded and fired and covered with a flat rock. The same kind of pit was sometimes made in the side veranda for storing sweet potatoes, but nothing was stored in the kraal.

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5



754 to hide his household goods for, says he, "How
695 do we know we shall return from there." And all
791 their beads are taken off. When they see the sun is beginning to rise, every one assembles. And then they begin to pick out some strong young men, saying, "So and so must stay behind, and so and so, they must look after their companions and keep guard over the village, lest the medicine man's children begin to pillage the property of them who do not die." And then they begin to set out to go to the spot the poison is to be drunk at, and they [412] carry in readiness a grain mortar and a pestle (just any mortar), and follow the path in single file, and come to where the witch doctor is, and he begins to arrange them in a line; they do not turn their backs to the sun, the women spread out in one line, the men in another. The place is black with people. [292] The medicine man has his feather head-dress on, and goat's-hair bands are round his wrists. And then some old man gets up to present that for which the medicine is pounded, perhaps a goat, and this is for opening his bag [where he keeps the poison].

III. Thereupon the doctor says, "Give to me the spirit of the dead." Then that old man gets up, and going up to the village chief, tells him "The doctor is seeking the spirit of the dead." And the chief speaks, saying, "Well, and know you not them who have died here?" And then the old man gives him, the doctor, the spirit, saying, "Here so and so, and so and so have died, and it is on their account we summon you." Then the pounder of the poison says, "Give to me the partakers of human flesh who have eaten these ones you name." And then they call up two people, a man and a woman, saying, "Let her of the race of the Hills, and him of such and such a clan come here." And them they thus called come and stand near the mortar. Then